perplexity

Short Answer

Yes, this is a conceivable and textually defensible reading — a number of scholars and commentators argue the ten virgins (Greek: *parthenoi*) are not merely bridesmaids attending someone else's bride but are themselves the collective bridal party representing the Church/believers who are, individually and corporately, "betrothed" to Christ as in 2 Corinthians 11:2. However, it remains a minority-to-mixed position; the traditional and still-dominant view treats them as bridal attendants representing the Church distinct from an unmentioned bride, or as a symbolic device where the bride simply isn't part of the illustration's point. [1] [2] [3] [4]

The Case for "Virgins as the Bride"

The strongest textual observation is that the Greek word for "bride" (*nymphē*) never appears anywhere in the parable — only *parthenoi* ("virgins" or "young unmarried women"). Since the whole point of the story is readiness to be joined with the bridegroom, and since no separate bride is ever introduced or referenced, some interpreters argue Jesus deliberately omitted the bride figure because the virgins themselves occupy that role symbolically. This reading is reinforced by the direct linguistic echo between the parable's *parthenoi* and Paul's language in 2 Corinthians 11:2, where he describes the Corinthian believers as a collective "chaste virgin" (*parthenon*) betrothed to Christ as one husband. Revelation 14:4 similarly describes the redeemed as "virgins" who "follow the Lamb," a term commentators link directly back to this parable's imagery. On this view, the ten virgins represent the whole company of professing believers, and the "wise" ones — those who enter with the bridegroom into the wedding feast — constitute the actual Bride of Christ, while the "foolish" are shut out entirely. [5] [6] [7] [8] [2] [3]

The Traditional Counter-Reading

The majority historical-critical view, reflected in classic commentaries and reference works, holds that the parable draws on real first-century Judean wedding customs in which the bridegroom, after completing betrothal arrangements, traveled by night with companions to the wedding hall, where a group of young women — friends of the bride, not the bride herself — waited with lamps to greet the party and light the way. Lange's commentary crystallizes this position: "The Church, in her aggregate and ideal unity, is the bride; the members of the Church, as individually called, are guests... they are his virgins". On this reading, the bride is omitted from the parable not because the virgins replace her, but because the narrative's focus is entirely on watchfulness and preparedness — the bride's identity and presence are simply irrelevant to the lesson being taught. A related dispensationalist strand (e.g., GotQuestions) reads the bridesmaids as Israel rather than the Church at all, reserving "Bride of Christ" language exclusively for the Church in a separate rapture event. [9] [7] [4] [1]

Your Specific Argument About Polygamy and Roman/Mosaic Law

Your point that neither the Law of Moses nor Roman law prohibited polygamy is historically accurate and is explicitly invoked by proponents of the "virgins-as-Bride" reading to argue there is no legal or cultural barrier to reading the parable as ten simultaneous brides rather than requiring a single missing bride figure. One hermeneutics discussion states plainly: "The ten virgins in this parable clearly refer to the church members... The ten virgins in this parable are all, very clearly, brides of Christ," treating the "polygamous" framing as consistent with ancient marriage custom rather than an obstacle. Others counter that even though polygamy was legally permitted, "Jewish men do not marry ten girls at one time" as a matter of common practice, so the multiple-brides reading, while not legally impossible, doesn't match typical social custom of the period — favoring instead the corporate/singular Bride (the Church or new Jerusalem) with the virgins as her representatives or attendants. [8] [10]

Comparing the Two Readings

Aspect	Virgins = Bride (corporate)	Virgins = Bridesmaids (attendants)
Key evidence	*Nymphē* never used; parallels 2 Cor. 11:2, Rev. 14:4 [6] [7]	Reflects standard Jewish wedding custom of attendant maidens [1]
Bride's absence explained by	Virgins *are* the bride collectively; no separate figure needed [5]	Bride's identity is simply irrelevant to the parable's point [4]
Polygamy/legal argument	No legal barrier under Mosaic or Roman law to multiple brides motif [8]	Legally permitted but not customary; doesn't require multi-bride reading [10]
Who is "shut out"	Foolish virgins forfeit bridal status, are excluded from the marriage [8]	Foolish attendants fail their duty and are barred from the feast [1]
Dominant among	Some evangelical/eschatological teachers, hermeneutics forums [5] [8]	Classical exegetes (Lange, Alford), mainstream commentaries [7] [1]

Assessment

Your reading has genuine textual footing — the conspicuous absence of *nymphē*, combined with the *parthenos* betrothal language Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 11:2 for the whole believing community, gives real weight to treating the virgins as the Bride herself rather than mere attendants. The polygamy-legality point closes off one common objection (that a "multi-bride" image would be culturally unthinkable), since both Mosaic and Roman law technically permitted plural marriage, even though it wasn't standard practice for ordinary households. That said, this remains a live exegetical debate rather than a settled consensus — most historic commentaries still read the parable as focused purely on watchfulness, treating the virgins as representative Church members or bridal attendants whose relationship to an implied Bride is deliberately left undeveloped because it isn't the parable's teaching point. Given the corporate (not individual) way the New Testament elsewhere speaks of "the Bride" as singular and unified (Revelation 21:2, 21:9), a defensible synthesis is that the wise virgins collectively constitute that singular Bride, while the foolish, by their failure, forfeit inclusion in her — making this less an "either/or" than a matter of which virgins ultimately qualify. [6] [7] [10] [2] [4] [5] [8] [1]

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1. https://biblehub.com/matthew/25-1.htm
2. https://www.bibleref.com/2-Corinthians/11/2-Corinthians-11-2.html
3. https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/2-Corinthians-11-2/
4. https://andrewcphiri.com/2019/02/16/4571/
5. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lDVVbQeNF1s&list=TLPQMDYxMTIwMjV317SqdKRBqQ&index=7
6. https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/the-bridegroom-and-the-bride
7. https://es.slideshare.net/slideshow/matthew-25-commentary/53577987
8. https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/406/are-the-ten-virgins-told-in-jesus-parable-multiple-brides-or-just-general-wed
9. https://www.gotquestions.org/parable-ten-virgins.html
10. https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/29160/in-the-parable-of-the-10-virgins-matthew-25-vs-1-8-who-is-the-groom-coming
11. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOYKA1DchqM&vl=en
12. https://www.thebridgewired.com/devo/2022/5-3
13. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parable_of_the_Ten_Virgins
14. https://www.reddit.com/r/Christians/comments/uj6uqd/im_kind_of_confused_about_the_parable_of_the_ten/
15. https://www.bible.com/bible/compare/2CO.11.2